

3.0 Affected Environment

3.1 Land Use

3.1.1 Regional and Local Setting

The study area for the proposed project is in Imperial County, in the Yuha Desert, and is entirely on federal lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management. Areas to the north and east of the study area include land that is almost entirely privately owned and used for agricultural purposes.

3.1.1.1 Federal Lands

Bureau of Land Management

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the BLM is responsible for the administration of all public lands under its jurisdiction. Using the principles of multiple use, BLM administers lands that are used for numerous purposes. Sensitive lands under BLM's jurisdiction include Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and Wilderness Areas. The proposed project is located entirely within the Yuha Basin ACEC designated in the *California Desert Conservation Area Plan* (Figure 3.1.1).

3.1.1.2 Local Jurisdictions

County of Imperial

Imperial County is located in the southeastern corner of California. It is bordered on the west by San Diego County, on the north by Riverside County, on the east by the Colorado River which forms the Arizona boundary, and on the south by the 84 miles of International Boundary with Mexico.

Approximately fifty percent of the land in Imperial County is undeveloped and under federal ownership and jurisdiction. Presently, one-fifth of the nearly three million acres of the county is irrigated for agricultural purposes, most notably the central area known as the Imperial Valley. The developed areas, where the county's incorporated cities, unincorporated communities, and supporting facilities are situated, comprise less than one percent of the total land area. Approximately seven percent of the county is covered by the Salton Sea.

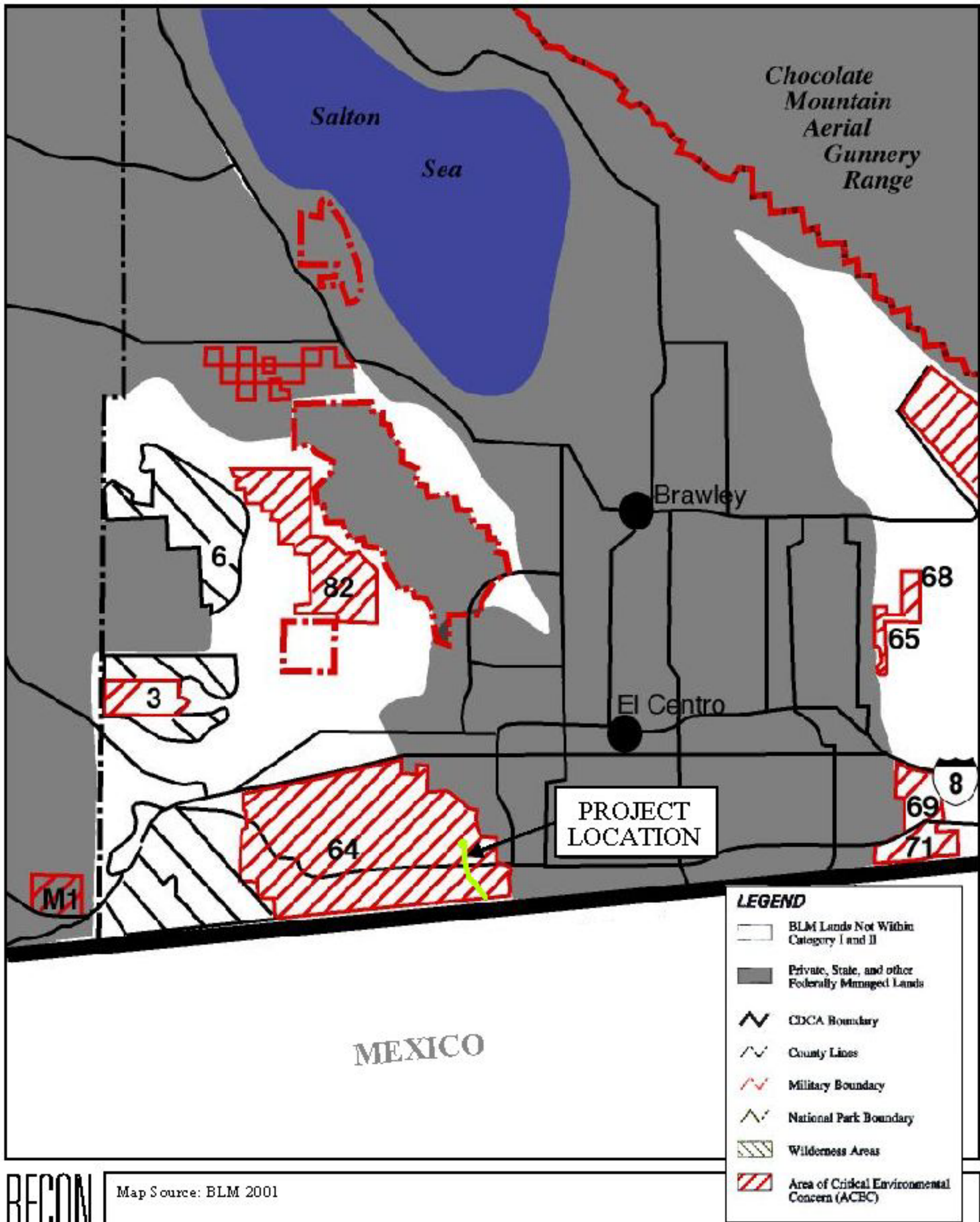


FIGURE 3.1.1
Conservation Plan

3.1.2 Land Use Plans and Policies and Proposed Land Uses

3.1.2.1 Federal Lands

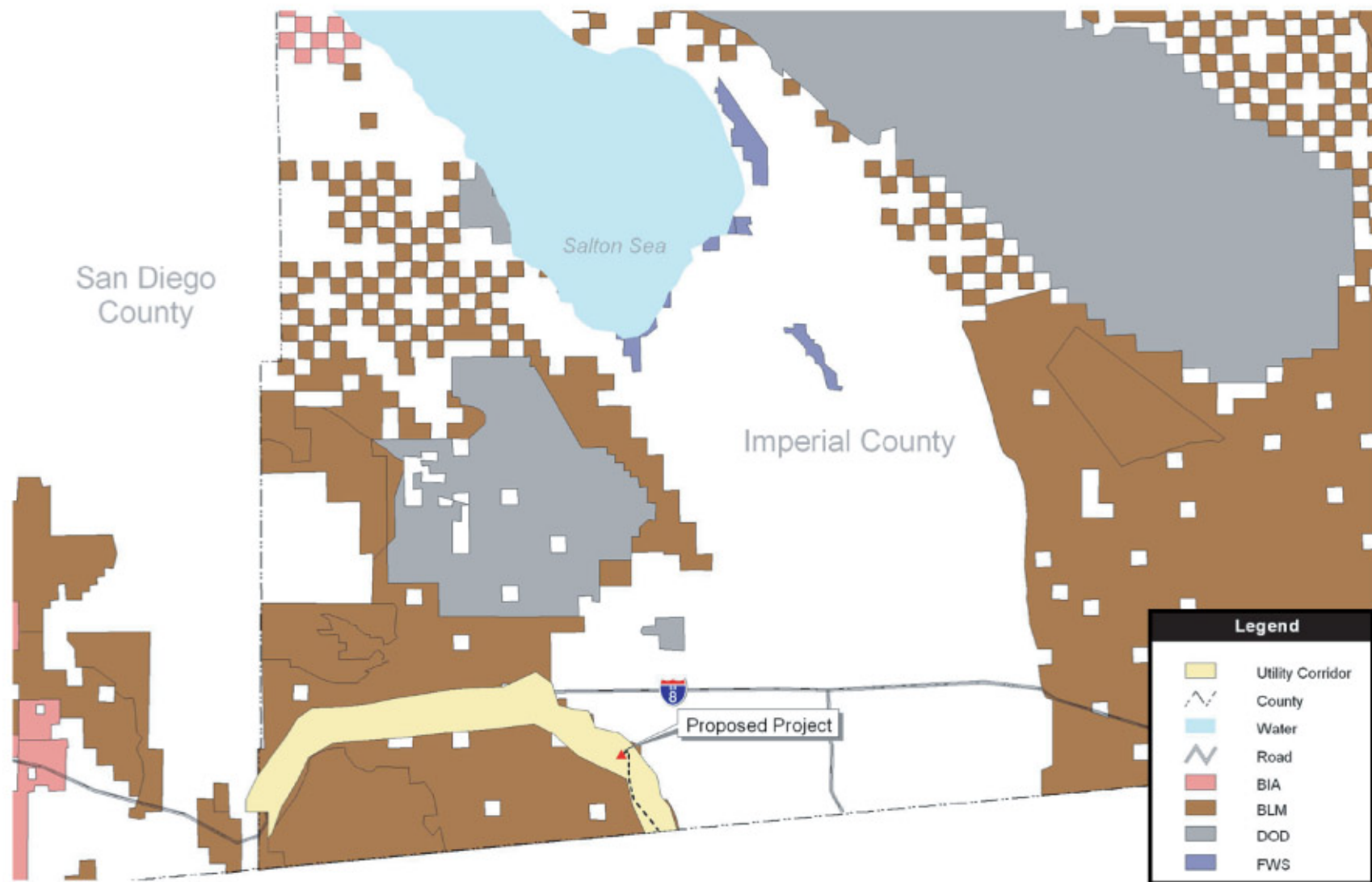
BLM Lands

BLM is the responsible agency for management of the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA). A long-term plan, the *California Desert Conservation Area Plan* (BLM 1980), establishes guidance for the management of public lands of the desert by BLM, as expressed in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The goal of the Desert Plan is to provide for the use of the public lands and resources of the California Desert Conservation Area, including economic, educational, scientific, and recreational uses, in a manner which enhances wherever possible—and which does not diminish, on balance—the environmental, cultural, and aesthetic values of the desert and its future productivity (BLM 1980). The Desert Plan designates Utility Corridor N stretching from the international border with Mexico to U.S. Interstate 8. The existing SDG&E transmission line and substation, as well as the proposed routes of the BCP and SER transmission lines, are located within Utility Corridor N (Figure 3.1.2).

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The California desert is vast and contains many areas with sensitive or unique resources. These areas may be considered special because of the unusual diversity of plant or animal life, unique geologic features or fossil remains, rare concentrations of the remains of historic or prehistoric use and occupation, or other distinct values. In order to manage these unique resources, BLM has developed management programs under the CDCA Plan called Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

Section 103(a) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act defines an ACEC as an area “within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.” In order to qualify as an ACEC, an area must meet “relevance and importance criteria” as defined in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. An environmental or historic resource can be found “relevant” if special management action is required to protect or prevent irreparable damage to the resource (BLM 1980). An environmental resource can be found “important” if it has qualities that give it special worth, consequence, meaning, or distinctiveness. Resources are also generally of more than local significance. Circumstances that make such a resource fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change are among causes for concern (BLM 1980).

The proposed BCP and SER 230 kV transmission line routes cross the Yuha Basin ACEC (ACEC No. 64). The land use classification for this ACEC is Multiple-Use Class L



Map Source: Intergen, 2001



FIGURE 3.1.2
Utility Corridor N

(limited use). This class protects sensitive, natural, scenic, ecological, and cultural resource values. Public lands designated as Class L are managed to provide generally lower-intensity, carefully controlled, multiple use of resources, while ensuring that sensitive values are not significantly damaged.

Wilderness Areas. In addition to ACECs, BLM has set aside thousands of acres of land in a system of Wilderness Areas. These areas are intended to preserve wilderness as part of the CDCA Plan. The proposed project avoids all Wilderness Areas, and these areas would not pose constraints regarding the construction and operation of the proposed project.

Mineral Resources. The ancient shoreline of Lake Cahuilla, in combination with the younger sediments present, comprises a potential source of mineral material for the sand and gravel industries in the Imperial Valley. The proposed project parallels SDG&E's existing 230 kV transmission line and is largely parallel to the old shoreline, crossing it twice south of State Route 98. Both of the proposed transmission lines, along with the existing SDG&E alignment, traverse two sand and gravel extraction leasehold areas of Imperial County. While these leaseholds are termed "active," at this time no extraction operations are being conducted (pers. comm. Higgins 2001).

The potential for geothermal resources within the study area is evidenced by numerous geothermal lease applications received by the BLM. At this time there are no current leases within the vicinity of the project alignment. There are no mining claims within the proposed project area (pers. comm. Marty 2001).

3.1.2.2 Local Jurisdictions

County of Imperial

The proposed project is located on federally-owned land managed by the BLM within Imperial County and is under the jurisdiction of the BLM. The land use plans and policies of the County of Imperial do not apply to BLM-managed land.

3.2 Air Quality

3.2.1 Regional Climate

The desert region of Imperial County in the area of the Yuha Basin and El Centro is one of the hottest and driest parts of California, with a climate characterized by hot, dry summers and relatively mild winters. In El Centro, the normal maximum temperature in January is a little less than 70 degrees Fahrenheit (F); the normal minimum temperature in January is around 39 degrees F. In July, the normal maximum temperature is over 107